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ABSTRACT

A 1981 survey was conducted to gather information on income, employment, educational background and aspirations, and demographic characteristics of adult students attending credit evening courses and recent high school graduates admitted provisionally to a day developmental studies program at Canisius College. The survey was undertaken to provide a profile of students enrolled in the Continuing Studies Division of the private, urban college. Responses were obtained from 652 evening students and 151 provisional students of the private, urban college. It was found that younger adults, many of them single and without dependents, made up a large part of the student body. These students were typically not affluent, were more interested in business degrees than liberal arts degrees, and were paying for education with their earnings and savings and some support from employers. Students in a provisional admissions program designed exclusively for new high school graduates were less likely to pursue business degrees, were paying for education with loans and grants as well as savings, and were somewhat more interested in liberal learning than were the older adults. Both groups of students chose the college primarily because of its good academic reputation. (Author/SW)

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A BRIEF SURVEY OF EVENING ADULT AND PROVISIONAL ADMISSION STUDENTS AT AN URBAN PRIVATE COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

A brief survey of students in evening programs at a private 4-year college in Buffalo, N.Y. discovered that primarily younger adults, many of them single and without dependents, make up the student body. These students are typically not affluent, are more interested in business degrees than liberal arts degrees, and are paying for education with their earnings and savings and some support from employers. Students in a provisional admissions program designed exclusively for new high school graduates are less likely to pursue business degrees, are paying for education with loans and grants as well as savings, and are somewhat more interested in liberal learning than are the older adults. Both groups of students chose "has a good academic reputation" as the primary reason for attending this college.

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I. INTRODUCTION

As more and more colleges begin to enroll larger numbers of adult and other non-traditional students, colleges must begin to study these students with the same kind of energy they have previously exerted on their traditional students. This survey was an attempt to gather basic income, employment, educational, and demographic information on two specific groups of students: (1) Adult students attending credit bearing evening division courses; and (2) recent high-school graduates who have sought admission to the college's undergraduate day-division programs but who have been admitted instead to a provisional program requiring a year of study involving some late afternoon or evening classes as well as developmental studies in various skill areas as needed. These students are later permitted admission to their chosen day-divisions and programs if they can successfully complete 24 credit hours and maintain a 2.00 grade point average during the provisional year.

The survey was the first substantial and comprehensive study of the students in the Continuing Studies Division at Canisius College. Because the survey was conducted on classroom time during the first week of classes, it was possible to obtain extremely high participation in the survey: 652 evening students, or 85% of all those enrolled in Fall 1981, and 151 provisional students, or 76.3% of all those in attendance that semester, responded to the survey.

II. THE COLLEGE AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

Canisius College is an independent, private, urban college located in Buffalo, New York. Founded by German Jesuits in 1870 as a liberal arts college, the original College of Arts and Sciences has grown to

include a Graduate Division, a School of Business Administration, and a Division of Continuing Studies and Summer Session. Total enrollment for the 1981-82 year was over 4,400 students in all divisions; over 1,000 students participated in some aspect of the Continuing Studies Division's programs.

The College offers twenty-eight undergraduate majors, four pre-professional programs (law, engineering, medical/dental, and forestry/environmental science), and master's degrees in business and seven different areas of education.

The Continuing Studies Division is responsible for virtually all the academic programs that attract adult learners including: nine bachelor's degrees, two associate's degrees, special entry programs for women and first-time adult students, portfolio review of non-collegiate learning, audio and video cassette courses for degree credit, three certificate programs of thirty credit hours each, and numerous non-credit special programs for business, government, social, religious, and educational groups.

The Buffalo area itself is going through a tumultuous and radical transformation. Formerly a predominantly industrial city, Buffalo has become more service and trade oriented, due in large part to the three recessions that have plagued the American economy since 1970. This reorientation of the area's economy, together with the present recession, has produced high unemployment and a substantial loss of jobs. The latest figures available from the New York State Department of Labor place unemployment at 12.5%, substantially higher than the national

average of 8.4%. Furthermore, the number of jobs declined by nearly ten thousand in 1981 alone. These statistics suggest the cause for the substantial population decline in the Buffalo metropolitan area since 1970. The 1980 census figure was 1,242,600; a loss of 106,600 residents over the past decade, or a 7.9% decrease, twice that of New York State. More startling, the population of Buffalo declined by 104,900 or 22.7%. These statistics indicate the seriousness of the condition of the Buffalo economy.

Finally, Canisius College is in a highly competitive educational market. It is essentially surrounded by the State's largest university center, SUNY Buffalo (25,000 students); its largest college, SUNY College at Buffalo (14,000 students); its largest community college, Erie Community College (11,000 students on three campuses); four other private four-year colleges; and three private two-year colleges. In these respects, Canisius resembles many other urban, private colleges in the mainstream of American higher education. It may be suggested that the results of this survey may be generalized to many other colleges in similar environments.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tables A through M summarize the numbers and percentages of responses to the various questions on the survey instrument. The questions were broken into four areas which were of greatest interest to college authorities: (1) basic demography; (2) educational background and goals; (3) employment and income; and (4) other information.

1. Basic Demography. Tables A and B show the breakdown of students in both evening and provisional programs by sex and age.

TABLE A

NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN PROGRAMS BY SEX

	Adult Evening Students		Provisional Students	
Male	352	(54.1%)	97	(64.7%)
Female	229	(45.9%)	53	(35.3%)
Total	681	(100%)	150	(100%)

TABLE B

NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN PROGRAMS BY AGE

Adult Evening Students			Provisional Students		
19 & Under	74	(11.5%)	19 & Under	144	(96.0%)
20-24	229	(35.4%)	20-24	4	(2.7%)
25-29	125	(19.3%)	25-29	1	(.7%)
30-34	87	(13.5%)	30-34	0	
35-39	71	(11.0%)	35-39	0	
40-44	31	(4.8%)	40-44	0	
45-49	17	(2.6%)	45-49	0	
50-59	10	(1.5%)	50-59	1	(.7%)
60 & Over	2	(.3%)	60 & Over	0	
Total	646	(100%)		150	(100%)

(Percentages may not add exactly because of rounding. The provisional student indicated in the 50-59 age group apparently represents a coding error.)

College officials were surprised to learn of the relative youthfulness of the evening adult students: a full 66.2% of evening students are less than 30 years old. A small percentage of these students were in the provisional program and are now continuing in the evening division because of financial reasons, convenience for work scheduling, or personal choice. The College appears to be attracting younger adults who feel they can still benefit from the long-range benefits of a liberal education rather than adults in the 30-40 age categories who might be looking for skills applicable to an immediate job change or promotion. Males are overrepresented among provisional students whereas evening students are more equally distributed.

Tables C, D, E, and F describe information on the marital status, ethnicity, religion, and family dependents for students in the programs.

TABLE C

MARITAL STATUS

Adult Evening Students			Provisional Students		
Single	390	(60.3%)	Single	148	(98.7%)
Married	198	(30.6%)	Married	0	
Widowed	6	(.9%)	Widowed	1	(.7%)
Divorced	45	(7.0%)	Divorced	0	
Separated	8	(1.2%)	Separated	1	(.7%)
Total	647	(100%)	Total	150	(100%)

TABLE D

ETHNIC

	Evening Adult Students			Provisional Students	
White	552	(87.1%)	White	142	(94.7%)
Black	73	(11.5%)	Black	8	(5.3%)
Hispanic	5	(.8%)	Hispanic	0	
Asian	1	(.2%)	Asian	0	
Indian	3	(.5%)	Indian	0	
Total	634	(100%)		150	(100%)

TABLE E

RELIGION

	Evening Adult Students			Provisional Students	
Catholic	447	(71.1%)	Catholic	124	(83.8%)
Protestant	103	(16.4%)	Protestant	13	(8.8%)
Jewish	3	(.5%)	Jewish	2	(1.4%)
Other	47	(7.5%)	Other	6	(4.1%)
None	29	(4.6%)	None	3	(2.0%)
Total	629	(100%)	Total	148	(100%)

TABLE F

NUMBER OF DEPENDENTS WITHIN FAMILY

Evening Adult Students			Provisional Students		
None	348	(55.2%)	None	29	(19.6%)
One	87	(13.8%)	One	23	(15.5%)
Two	67	(10.6%)	Two	23	(15.5%)
Three	64	(10.1%)	Three	33	(22.3%)
Four+	65	(10.3%)	Four+	40	(27.0%)
Total	631	(100%)	Total	148	(100%)

The general picture of the evening adult student that emerges in these tables is that of a relatively young and frequently independent person: 60% are single and 55.2% have no dependents residing in their home. This result was surprising because Buffalo has always been looked upon as a city of closely-knit family lives where children would live at home until they married and lived with their spouses. This picture did not necessarily fit evening students at Canisius. On the other hand, the religious and ethnic backgrounds of students were very much as expected by college officials. The vast majority of students are white and Catholic, but these proportions are somewhat lower than the respective categories for traditional day-division undergraduate students at this college.

2. Educational Background and Goals. Tables G, H, and I describe the level of education, other colleges attended, and chosen degree, major or certificate.

TABLE G

HIGHEST LEVEL OF FORMAL EDUCATION COMPLETED

Adult Evening Students			Provisional Students		
High School	221	(35.4%)	High School	144	(95.4%)
GED	16	(2.6%)	GED	1	(.7%)
Voc. Tech.	10	(1.6%)	Voc. Teach.	1	(.7%)
V-T Grad.	12	(1.9%)	V-T Grad.	2	(1.3%)
College	141	(22.6%)	College	0	
Associate	125	(20.0%)	Associate	1	(.7%)
Bachelor	54	(8.7%)	Bachelor	1	(.7%)
Other	45	(7.2%)	Other	1	(.7%)
Total	624	(100%)	Total	151	(100%)

(Coding errors account for provisional students indicating associate's and bachelor's degrees. No provisional students had previously earned college degrees.)

TABLE H

EVENING ADULT STUDENTS: OTHER COLLEGES ATTENDED

	Attended One Other College	Attended Two Other Colleges (Second College Identified)	Attended Three Other Colleges (Third College Identified)	Total
Bryant & Stratton Bus. Inst.	35	14	1	50
Buffalo State Univ. Coll.	31	16	4	51
Daemen Coll.	4	2	0	6
D'Youville Coll.	8	0	0	8
Erie Community Coll.	83	30	6	119
Medaille Coll.	2	0	0	2
Niagara CC	13	4	1	18
SUNY Buffalo	58	36	7	101
Other	169	63	18	250
Total	403	165	37	605

(N.B. Provisional students were all first time college students who had attended no other colleges.)

TABLE I

DEGREE, MAJOR, OR CERTIFICATE

	Adult Evening Students		Provisional Students	
Accounting	164	(25.2%)	27	(17.9%)
Communication	48	(7.4%)	9	(6.0%)
English	21	(3.2%)	5	(3.3%)
History	15	(2.3%)	4	(2.6%)
Humanities	14	(2.1%)	2	(1.3%)
Management	203	(31.1%)	31	(20.5%)
Marketing	50	(7.7%)	17	(11.3%)
Physical Education	11	(1.7%)	11	(7.3%)
Psychology	31	(4.8%)	14	(9.3%)
Social Sciences	11	(1.7%)	5	(3.3%)
Sociology	21	(3.2%)	4	(2.6%)
Technical & Liberal Studies	16	(2.5%)	2	(1.3%)
AA/Humanities	4	(.6%)	2	(1.3%)
AA/Social Sciences	5	(.8%)	3	(2.0%)
Certificate in Gerontology	8	(1.2%)	0	
Certificate in Criminal Justice	10	(1.5%)	1	(.7%)
Other	94	(14.4%)	37	(24.5%)

(Percentages add to more than 100% because some students are pursuing dual programs.)

Some important generalizations can be drawn from these tables. Not surprisingly, 64% of evening students are pursuing the business degrees of accounting, management, and marketing. A smaller percentage pursues degrees in the humanities or social sciences. These figures differ dramatically from the students in the College's day division in which the breakdown between business majors and arts and sciences majors is almost exactly 50% each. It was also enlightening to learn that 62% of evening students are not neophytes to higher education but have attended other institutions. It appears that evening students are more strongly interested in majors that tend to offer advancement in the business world than are their day division colleagues.

The provisional students closely reflect the interests of the College's traditional day division freshmen in that 49.7% of provisional students were interested in a business major. In general it appears that younger students are somewhat more interested in studying liberal arts majors than are the older adults.

In a separate item students were asked to indicate the areas in which they would like to see more classes offered. Computer science (requested by 48% of evening adults and 51% of provisional students) and law (36% of evening adults and 32% of provisional students) were the classes most frequently requested.

3. Employment and income. Tables J, K, and L describe the work status, work hours, and family income of students in the programs.

TABLE J

WORK STATUS

	Adult Evening Students			Provisional Students	
Employed	490	(77.5%)	Employed	61	(40.9%)
Unemployed	66	(10.4%)	Unemployed	33	(22.1%)
Home	17	(2.7%)	Home	2	(1.3%)
Retired	4	(.6%)	Retired	0	
Student	55	(8.7%)	Student	53	(35.6%)
Total	632		Total	149	

TABLE K

NUMBERS OF HOURS OF WORK PER WEEK

	Adult Evening Students			Provisional Students	
1-10	16	(3.1%)	1-10	9	(12.3%)
11-20	56	(10.9%)	11-20	44	(59.5%)
21-30	40	(7.8%)	21-30	12	(16.2%)
31-40	133	(25.8%)	31-40	9	(12.2%)
Over 40	271	(52.5%)	Over 40	0	
Total	516		Total	74	

A much higher percentage (77.5%) of Evening students work compared to provisional students (40.9%). Most Evening students have been out of high school for several years and have already entered the work force with the majority of these adult students working full time. (78.3% are working over 30 hours.) The younger provisional students have just completed high school and generally have not yet worked full time year-round. Only 12% of these students work over 30 hours while most (59.5%) work 11-20 hours at part-time jobs.

TABLE L

ANNUAL GROSS FAMILY INCOME

	Adult Evening Students			Provisional Students	
< $ 6,000	66	(12.1%)	< $ 6,000	24	(19.7%)
6,000	75	(13.8%)	6,000	11	(9.0%)
10,000	99	(18.2%)	10,000	14	(11.5%)
15,000	79	(14.5%)	15,000	15	(12.3%)
20,000	77	(14.1%)	20,000	17	(13.9%)
25,000	47	(8.6%)	25,000	16	(13.1%)
30,000	57	(10.5%)	30,000	11	(9.0%)
40,000	28	(5.1%)	40,000	6	(4.9%)
> 50,000	17	(3.1%)	> 50,000	8	(6.6%)
Total	545	(100%)	Total	122	(100%)

Regarding income, the highest percentage of Evening students fall into the $10,000-$15,000 range. Only 27% of all Evening students who responded to this question reported incomes over

$25,000. While most of the evening students are employed (77.5%), the relative young age of the Evening Division might explain why these students have not achieved higher incomes. Most of these students have come to Canisius to obtain a college degree and to improve their employment and income potential.

It is very difficult to interpret provisional students' figures since some of these students apparently reported only their own personal income while others apparently reported their family income. It would seem unlikely that 19.7% of the provisional students' families have incomes under $6,000. That figure would seem more apt to be a student's part time and summer earnings. By the same token, it is highly unlikely that a student would earn over $20,000 by his own part-time labor. Those figures are almost certainly parental incomes.

The overall incomes of the families of provisional students seem somewhat higher than those of the evening students. 33.6% of provisional students' families have incomes over $25,000. The parents of the provisional students are generally older, may have a college degree, and have worked longer than the evening students.

For College officials the most important information gathered from these tables was the income of the adult students. It had been assumed that adult students were somewhat wealthier than actually determined by this survey.

4. Other Information. The survey also contained four opinion questions. Two questions asked the students to indicate the relative importance of factors influencing their decisions to continue their education, and to attend Canisius. The other questions related to sources of funding for the student's education and possible factors that might contribute to their interrupting their studies at Canisius.

Table M describes the four major reasons students indicated for continuing their education.

TABLE M

REASONS FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

	Adult Evening Students		Provisional Students	
to become better educated and informed	497	(76.4%)	128	(85.3%)
to obtain a higher degree	451	(69.3%)	114	(77.5%)
to meet job requirements or improve job skills	427	(65.6%)	96	(64.7%)
for personal satisfaction or happiness	409	(62.8%)	90	(60.4%)

(Students selected as many choices as they wished.)

Regarding their choice to attend Canisius, a large majority of both evening (76.9%) and provisional students (74.2%) specified "has a good academic reputation" as the major reason for attending this college. No other reason achieved a comparable level of significance.

Regarding sources of funding for education, 44% of evening students suggested that personal earnings were the most important major source of funding for educational costs. Only 30% of provisional students considered personal earnings as a major source of funding. The difference in ratings by provisional and evening students can perhaps be explained by the difference in their ages and employment status. The highest percentage of provisional students (59.5%) considered loans (student and other) to be a major source of their funding. A lower percentage of evening students (42.3%) considered loans to be a major source for funding. Many evening students take only one course and therefore are not eligible for various loans. Reimbursement by their employers was another important source of funding for evening students (29.1%) but not for provisional students (0%), who are not generally employed full time.

The last opinion question dealt with the student's contemplating interrupting his or her studies at Canisius. A higher percentage of evening students (12.1%) as compared to 5.5% of the provisional students indicated that they were thinking of stopping out of school. Evening students do frequently interrupt their studies because of family, job, or financial pressures. The two reasons both groups of students considered most consistently as contributing factors for interrupting their studies were related: "financial reasons" and the "high cost of college."

This information about reasons for attending and scurces of funding was important for the College because it dispelled two notions widely held about evening students: that they are relatively unconcerned about educational costs; and that the majority are supported by their employers. The survey showec that evening students have the same anxiety about costs as other students and that a majority are paying with their own earnings. Furthermore, it had been suggested by some college officials that more than 50% of evening students are supported by their employers when in fact only 29.1% actually are.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This brief survey, the first one ever conducted on a comprehensive sample of students in the Continuing Studies Division, was useful in creating a general profile of adult evening students and provisional admission students at Canisius College. Adult students appear to be: relatively young; not affluent; working full-time or nearly full-time; frequently not married and without dependents; typically paying their way with personal earnings; occasionally supported with employers' tuition benefits; most frequently interested in business degrees; and impressed by the academic reputation of the College. Provisional students appear to be: unmarried and still supported by their families; working only part-time jobs or not working at all; paying their way by loans and grants as well as earnings; interested in both business and liberal arts majors; and impressed with the reputation of the College.

The results of this survey have already helped Canisius in many areas of strategic planning for the early 1980's. The College plans an additional survey in the 1984-85 year to discover current trends and aid in planning for the late 1980's.